DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 248 167 SO 015 855

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TITLE Louis L'Amour's American West. A Sound Filmstrip Program. Study Guide.
REPORT NO MB-5543
PUB DATE 83
NOTE 13p.; Photographs may not reproduce clearly.
AVAILABLE FROM Media Basics, Inc., Larchmont Plaza, Larchmont, NY 10538 (sound filmstrip kit $136.50; study guide only, $1.00).
PUB TYPE Guides - Classroom Use - Guides (For Teachers) (052)

EDRS PRICE MF01 Plus Postage. PC Not Available from EDRS.
DESCRIPTORS Creative Writing; Expository Writing; Filmstrips; *History Instruction; *Interdisciplinary Approach; Learning Activities; Multimedia Instruction; *Novels; Secondary Education; *United States History; *United States Literature; Units of Study
IDENTIFIERS *Frontier History; *L Amour (Louis); United States (West)

ABSTRACT

Adapted from the motion picture based on two of Louis L'Amour's novels of the American West, "The Daybreakers" and "Sackett," this filmstrip program will help secondary students interpret the meaning of the frontier experience in American history. In the first three filmstrips--"Heading West," "Staking Claims," and "Keeping the Peace"--students examine themes of individualism, loyalty, justice, and courage and learn the importance of the frontier experience in shaping the American character. The fourth filmstrip examines the personal insights of L'Amour, author of 80 popular and widely read novels of the American West, concerning the meaning of the frontier in American life. Information provided in the study guide for each of the filmstrips includes a synopsis, activities to use with students before viewing the filmstrip, a listing of new vocabulary words, and themes to explore. Unit activities include discussion questions, ideas for creative and expository writing, topics for further investigation, and ways of comparing the books and the filmstrip. A brief bibliography of fiction and non-fiction books dealing with the frontier concludes the guide. (RM)

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OBJECTIVES

1. To introduce Louis L'Amour, a uniquely popular storyteller and respected authority on the American frontier.
2. To examine themes of individualism, loyalty, justice, and courage as reflected in the frontier experience.
3. To interpret the meaning of the frontier experience in American history and its importance in shaping the American character.
4. To encourage interest in reading through the works of Louis L'Amour, author of eighty western novels.

***LOUIS L'AMOUR'S AMERICAN WEST* Novels and Filmstrip Program**

As one of the most widely read authors in the world, Louis L'Amour's novels of the American West have sold more than 130 million copies to readers of all ages. So uniquely appealing are these extraordinary stories of frontier life, that many have been used to encourage reading among even the most reluctant learners. This filmstrip program is adapted from the motion picture based on two of L'Amour's most enduring novels, *The Daybreakers* and *Sackett*. This unit faithfully captures the spirit of frontier America and introduces readers to the world of Louis L'Amour. A fourth filmstrip examines L'Amour's personal insights on the meaning of the frontier in American life.

LOUIS L'AMOUR'S AMERICAN WEST
A SOUND FILMSTRIP PROGRAM

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ABOUT THE NOVELS OF LOUIS L'AMOUR

Louis L'Amour's novels of the American West have three major themes: the movement of emigrants from East to West; the discovery of the frontier way of life; and the development from savagery to civilization. His novels about the Sackett brothers begin by establishing the importance of their past: the Sacketts, who come from a very small town in Tennessee, are poor, honorable and numerous. They have been raised by decent and moral parents, yet they must leave the place which has been their home for generations because, like all nineteenth-century heroes, they are seeking their fortunes.

The Sackett brothers – a separate novel is devoted to each one – are proud and talented, but very much at a disadvantage: in a century demanding all kinds of practical and theoretical knowledge they have had almost no formal education. The story of their adventures in the old West is about the acquisition of knowledge as well as of experience. The great event in a Sackett story is often the discovery of a book – for example, the commentaries of Blackstone – which takes on great meaning for the characters. Sometimes it is about their learning to read and write. Always it is about their admiration for certain ideas.

During the course of their adventures the brothers find out how murderous the frontier can be. Because the Sacketts are moral and idealistic they come into conflict with those who are not. They are forced to fight when they see how rustlers and land grabbers victimize the innocent. Reluctantly they become marshalls or gunfighters, and they gain the reputation, often undeserved, of being mere killers or pistoleros. But they dislike violence and mistrust heroism. They wish they were something more.

By the end of a L'Amour novel, the heroes have affirmed their values. They stand up for justice and beat back all of the hard-drinking, land-grabbing, back-shooting villains of the piece. Inevitably they marry and pursue some kind of education. They create some enterprise – a ranch, a mine, or a community – which is greater than any single man. So that it may be said that while these adventure stories are full of smoking guns and bar-room brawls, the end of all their action is to make wilderness into civilization.

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FILMSTRIP 1 – HEADING WEST

Parallels Chapters I-X in THE DAYBREAKERS

SYNOPSIS:

When an old feud with the Higgins family erupts into violence, Tyrel and Orrin Sackett must leave their home in Tennessee and go west. Joining a group of cowboys on a cattle drive, they meet Cap Rountree, an old-timer, and Tom Sunday, an educated cowhand from the east. When they get to Abilene, Orrin meets Laura Pritts and her father. Jonathan Pritts is working to gain control of the land from Don Luis and other Mexican ranchers. Reed Carney, harboring a grudge against Tyrel all through the cattle drive, forces a show down on the streets of Abilene. Tyrel acts with restraint and avoids the gun duel which would have left Carney dead. Impressed with Tyrel's courage, Don Luis invites him to ride with the Mexicans on their way home to Santa Fe. Tyrel accepts and starts out for open country with Orrin, Cap and Tom.

BEFORE VIEWING:

1. Louis L'Amour has said:

   Anybody can identify with the West because it is wide open; it's a new country; it's a fresh country; and the frontier is always with us. The frontier is that point beyond which we haven't gone.

   A. Why is the image of the frontier appealing to us?
   B. What does L'Amour mean when he says the frontier is the point beyond which we haven't gone?
   C. What frontiers are left to us today?

2. A frontier is often viewed as being a positive influence in a person's life. It can also be seen as a destructive force. Discuss the pros and cons of living on a frontier. Use examples from history to illustrate your point.

VOCABULARY:

sodbusters	open range	maverick
ramrod	metropolis	rivulets
vaqueros	reviled	sardonically
	supposition	

EXPLORING THEMES:

1. Why does Tyrel feel he has to leave Tennessee after shooting Long Higgins? Why does he head west?
2. Why does Tom Sunday predict that Tyrel will have to kill Carney one day? How does Tyrel know that it is not necessary to kill him in their final showdown? What does this episode reveal about Tyrel's character?
3. What is the nature of the conflict between Pritts and Don Luis? Compare the way the Sacketts treat the Spaniards with the way Pritts views them. What explains the difference?
4. Based on the scenes depicted in the filmstrip, what four adjectives best de-

FILMSTRIP 1 – HEADING WEST

scribe the cattle drive? What kind of hardships did cowboys face on those long drives?

5. Why might an educated man like Tom Sunday have headed west?
6. How do the terms "open range" and "long drive" explain the lifestyle and economy of the old west?
7. Moving large herds of cattle to market across open land brings the cowboys into conflict with settlers. What are the reasons for this conflict? What episodes in the filmstrip illustrate this conflict? What do they show about the need for law and order?
8. What do we learn about Tyrel's character and personality from his first meeting with Belden, Tom Sunday, Cap Rountree, and Carney?
9. Why does Don Luis allow Tyrel to go with him to Santa Fe? What does he especially admire about Tyrel? Why?

FILMSTRIP 2 – STAKING CLAIMS

Parallels Chapters VI-XIV in THE DAYBREAKERS and Chapters I-IX in SACKETT

SYNOPSIS:

Tell Sackett is working in a gold mine when he shoots Wes Bigelow for cheating at cards. To avoid unnecessary bloodshed, Tell leaves the mine before Bigelow's brothers return to fight. On the trail, Tell finds an old Spanish mine that still has enough gold to make him rich. When he brings ore samples to the assay office in **Purgatorie**,he meets his brothers, Orrin and Tyrel, whom he has not seen in ten years. Cap Rountree joins Tell to work the mine while Orrin and Tyrel go with Tom Sunday to round up stray cattle. The three come upon a wagon which had been attacked by Indians. When they discover a box of money in the wagon, Tom urges them to keep it. But Orrin and Tyrel insist the money must be sent back to the rightful owners.

FILMSTRIP 2 – STAKING CLAIMS

BEFORE VIEWING:

In *Sackett*, Tell Sackett says,

> *Seems to me most of the folks doing all the talk about peace and giving the other fellow the benefit of the doubt were folks setting back to home in cushy chairs with plenty of grub around and the police nearby to protect them.*

1. What is Tell saying about the way our values are formed?
2. Do you agree? Explain.
3. To what extent did life on the frontier force the settlers to rethink their values and attitudes?

VOCABULARY:

assay	appaloosa	constitute
kinfolk	arbitrate	cinch
talus	yonder	skittish

EXPLORING THEMES:

1. Blackstone's *Commentaries* introduces the Sacketts to the concepts of majority rule and the rights of the individual. Why is this book important to the Sacketts? How do their actions illustrate their acceptance of Blackstone's theories?
2. What basic differences between the Sacketts and Tom Sunday are evident when they discover the money at the wagon train massacre? What do you believe are a person's responsibilities in such a situation? For example, what would you do if you received change for a $20 bill when you had given a clerk only $10? Is your reaction similar to Tom's or to the Sacketts'?
3. **Before Tell leaves the gold mine to go to Purgatorie, he is troubled by a strange feeling. What might it be?**
4. Why have family ties been important to the three Sackett brothers? What was the special importance of the family in settling the west?
5. How is Tell's confrontation with Kid Newton similar to Ty's confrontation with Carney? Explain. Compare the motives of the two brothers.
6. One of the reasons people went west was to seek their fortunes. How does each of the Sackett brothers attempt to seek his fortune? What are the obstacles each faces? Do you think their goals are realistic? Explain.

FILMSTRIP 3 – KEEPING THE PEACE

Parallels Chapters IX – XI in SACKETT

SYNOPSIS:

In the gold mine Cap and Tell discover a girl named Ange who has lived there since her father died several years before. Tell resolves to share the gold with her, and they begin working as the Bigelows close in for their revenge. When Orrin and Tom both want the sheriff's job, Pritts gives his support to Orrin and exposes Tom's criminal past to ensure his defeat. After Orrin is elected he discovers the unlawful and violent nature of Jonathan's activities. He severs his ties with the Pritts family and sees to it that Jonathan is arrested. After losing the election, Tom tries to kill Orrin and dies in the ensuing gun fight. Orrin and Tyrel receive a telegram from Ange and arrive in Purgatorie just in time to help Tell and Cap fight it out with the Bigelow brothers.

BEFORE VIEWING:

1. The United States acquired large portions of the southwest from Mexico after the Mexican War. Go to the map and locate the states created from lands acquired from Mexico in 1851.

2. Many Spanish and Mexican settlers remained on large tracts of land they owned in the new U. S. territories. What do you think their rights to land ownership and legal protection ***should*** have been under the U. S. government? What actually happened to their legal property rights?

VOCABULARY:

cantina	deposition	cantankerous
interlopers	gringos	greaser
bailiwick	livery	roan
	sashay	

FILMSTRIP 3 – KEEPING THE PEACE

EXPLORING THEMES:

1. Compare Pritts' attitude toward the Spanish-speaking people in New Mexico with what you know about the attitude of white settlers toward the Indians. How are they similar?

2. What is the basis of the quarrel between Tom Sunday and Orrin? What role does Tyrel play in their relationship?

3. Why does Orrin want to become sheriff? What are his beliefs about equal justice under the law?

4. What do the characters tell us about "law and order"? Do you think this approach can be used to solve problems today? Explain.

5. Why do the Bigelows want to kill Tell? Why does Tell try to avoid a confrontation with them?

6. Why does Kid Newton offer to show Bigelow where Cap and Tell are?

7. Why does Orrin reject Pritts? In what way was he misled by Pritts and his daughter?

8. Do you think the violence at the end of the filmstrip was a necessary part of the story? Why?

FILMSTRIP 4 – LOUIS L'AMOUR–FRONTIER STORYTELLER

SYNOPSIS.

This filmstrip presents an informal interview with author Louis L'Amour as he shares his views of the frontier and examines its influence on the American character. L'Amour provides candid insights into the role of pioneer women and frontier children; Indians and traders; lawmen and cowboys; rugged individualists and family settlers – and how each contributed to the growth of the west. L'Amour discusses themes of cultural identity, personal ethics and democratic values as they relate to the western experience. Through his own unique experiences and decades of historical research, L'Amour helps us appreciate the legacy of the American frontier.

FILMSTRIP 4 – LOUIS L'AMOUR–FRONTIER STORYTELLER

BEFORE VIEWING:

Louis L'Amour says that –

> *. . . the Western man was an individualist. He thought for himself; he solved his own problems, and this was the way he approached life.*

What part did individualism play in the development of this country? What are some contributions of these "rugged" individualists?

VOCABULARY:

migration	individualist	radical
impeached	tentative	permeated
reconnaissance	anecdote	scathing
compartmentalized	ethical	expansive

EXPLORING THEMES:

1. What role did restlessness and dissatisfaction play in the westward movement?
2. What does L'Amour mean when he says that " . . . something began to happen to people when they crossed the Mississippi River?"
3. How did the frontier experience help women achieve greater equality with men?
4. What is Louis L'Amour's attitude towards native Americans? Why does he think their culture and heritage were lost to them?
5. What common myths about the West does Louis L'Amour debunk?
6. Louis L'Amour says that in the West a person's problems were usually plain and clear cut. Do you agree? Explain. In what ways do L'Amour's novels reflect this view?

UNIT ACTIVITIES

I. FOR DISCUSSION

A. *Suddenly something happened to me, and it happened to Orrin, too. The world had burst wide open and where our narrow valleys had been, our hog-backed ridges, our huddled towns and villages, there was now a world without end or limit.*

What had happened to Ty in the description above? Do you think most of America's settlers felt this same emotion? Explain. What positive effect might the wide open country have had upon settlers? What negative effect might it have had?

B. Several important themes emerge from these stories. Discuss how self-reliance, cooperation, vengeance and justice relate to these themes. Use specific examples from the stories to support your views. What other important themes are found in these stories?

C. How do Orrin, Ty, and Tell Sackett illustrate the respect for education that was characteristic of the Westerner? Why was education important and necessary to the settlers?

II. CREATIVE AND EXPOSITORY WRITING

A. Write an imaginary journal of a frontier settler (man, woman, or child). Describe the conditions of that person's life, his/her work, dreams, fears and daily problems. Try to give the journal authenticity by including details of his/her life and family.

B. Write an essay explaining how the story of the Sacketts helps illustrate ideas about the frontier, settlers, law and justice which L'Amour expresses in the fourth filmstrip.

C. Write three entries from an imaginary journal which might have been written by a cowboy on a cattle drive. Try to capture the beauty and joy of the long drive as well as its hazards and hardships. Describe the cowboy's dreams, fears and preoccupations.

III. FOR FURTHER INVESTIGATION

A. Research Frederick Jackson Turner's Frontier Thesis. How does *Louis L'Amour's American West* confirm some of the ideas in Turner's Thesis? Explain with examples from the story.

B. Ty Sackett was only 19 years old at the time of the story told in the film strip. Research the role of young people on the frontier. Compare them with teenagers today.

C. In a report to the class describe how the west contributed to the development of women's rights in America. In your research be sure to include: obligations and responsibilities of frontier women; women's suffrage; the roles played by Jeanette Rankin, Nellie Taylor and Ma Ferguson.

IV. COMPARING BOOKS AND FILMSTRIP

A. The influence of family – parents as well as brothers – is an important theme in *The Daybreakers* and *Sackett*. Read the books and in a well organized essay compare how the family influenced each of the Sackett

brothers. How do the books add to your understanding of the men?

B. How are women characterized in each of the two books? How is their characterization different in the filmed version? Do the women appear to be stronger characters in the books or filmstrips? Explain.

C. Family bonds and community are important themes in Louis L'Amour's work. In the book, ***Sackett***, however, isolation is also an important element of the story. Read the book, and in an essay explain how Tell copes with isolation. What does his behavior reveal about his character? How do the themes of family and community emerge in this book?

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